



BOTULISM **(Foodborne, Infant/Intestinal and Wound Botulism)**

What is BOTULISM?

Botulism is a rare but serious illness that can result in paralysis and death. The bacteria, *Clostridium botulinum*, is commonly found in soil and can be carried in dust. *Clostridium botulinum* produces a toxin. Eating foods containing the botulism toxin causes foodborne botulism. Foodborne botulism is especially dangerous because several people can be poisoned by a single contaminated food. In the United States, infant or intestinal botulism is the most common form of botulism and mainly affects infants under 1 year of age. When individuals consume bacterial spores, they grow in the intestines and release the botulism toxin.

Who gets botulism?

Any person who eats food that contains the botulism toxin can be ill with botulism. It often involves improperly processed home canned foods. Botulism in infants under one year of age has been associated with the ingestion of contaminated honey. Wound botulism often results from contamination of the wound by ground in soil or gravel from an improperly treated compound fracture.

How is botulism spread?

Botulism is spread by eating a food with the toxin present or a food item containing bacterial spores. Person to person spread does not occur.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Both foodborne and infant botulism affect the nervous system. The symptoms of foodborne botulism include blurred or double vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, muscle weakness and paralysis (that starts from the head and spreads downward), and sometimes death. Infant botulism has a wide range of symptoms generally starting with constipation and followed by sluggishness and poor feeding to difficulty in swallowing, loss of head control and poor reflexes (floppy baby).

How do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of foodborne botulism usually appear 12-36 hours after ingestion, but may take several days. The time between exposure and onset of symptoms is unknown for infant/intestinal botulism.

What is the treatment of botulism?

Hospitalization is necessary for all forms of botulism. Some patients have trouble breathing, muscle weakness or paralysis, which may require a person to be on a breathing machine (ventilator/respirator). Antitoxin is given in certain cases of foodborne botulism, but infants receive botulinal immune globulin (BIG). Both treatments prevent the infection from worsening, but recovery still takes many weeks.

What happens if botulism is not treated?

Untreated botulism may result in death.

How can botulism be prevented?

Botulism can be prevented. Persons who do home canning should follow strict sanitary practices. Oils infused in garlic or herbs should be refrigerated. Potatoes baked while wrapped in aluminum foil should be kept hot until served or refrigerated. Persons who eat home canned foods should boil the food for 10 minutes before eating it. Children less than 12 months of age should not be fed honey or items sweetened with it.